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SUBJECT: GOR SYMPATHIZES WITH MUSHARRAF

REF: MOSCOW 4420

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns for reasons 1.4(b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The MFA tells us that the deteriorating domestic situation and limited political options "understandably" forced Musharraf to declare a state of emergency in Pakistan. MFA Pakistan Desk Chief Andrey Starkov argued that Musharraf had to prevent the invalidation of his re-election by the Pakistani Supreme Court and needed additional powers to fight extremists. The GOR is skeptical of proposals for a Musharraf-Bhutto power sharing agreement and doubts any leader but Musharraf could maintain stability and government control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. The GOR hopes Pakistani parliamentary elections will go forward, which could help ease the tense political situation. Putin and Indian Prime Minister Singh agreed during their November 12 meeting in Moscow that for now, Musharraf is the best hope of keeping Pakistan stable. The GOR has had limited contact with the GOP since the state of emergency was declared, which Starkov stressed was in keeping with the GOR's practice of limiting ties with Pakistan to avoid harming its relationship with India. End summary.

MFA: Musharraf's Options Limited

¶2. (C) On November 14, MFA Head of Department for Pakistan Andrey Starkov told us that the GOR "understood" Musharraf's decision to proclaim a state of emergency in Pakistan, given the rapidly unraveling political and security situation. With the Pakistani Supreme Court about to declare Musharraf's October 6 re-election invalid, and reports of increased terrorist activity by Islamic extremists, Musharraf was forced to take action to preserve both his political position and national stability. Starkov believed Musharraf's decision was based "75 percent" on the pending decision by the Supreme Court and "25 percent" on gaining additional powers to tackle terrorism. Should the Supreme Court have declared Musharraf's re-election invalid, this would have led to even greater political turmoil in the country, which extremists would have sought to exploit. Starkov conceded that the state of emergency damaged what legitimacy Musharraf had, but wondered what other options were open to him.

¶3. (C) Starkov reiterated the GOR's view that Musharraf is the only person capable of maintaining stability in Pakistan and keeping the nation's nuclear arsenal under control -- the Russian priority in Pakistan (reftel). He dismissed proposals for a Musharraf-Bhutto power sharing arrangement as unworkable and said the GOR viewed neither former Prime Minister Bhutto nor Sharif capable of maintaining Pakistani stability.

¶4. (C) When asked, Starkov said the GOR's position on Musharraf was not at odds with the MFA's November 6 public statement calling for a "return to the democratic process."

The GOR hoped Pakistani parliamentary elections would be held by January 2008, which could help settle the current political turmoil in the country. Starkov posited that Musharraf would not give in to U.S. calls to end the state of emergency, but might ease restrictions on political activity so the elections would be considered legitimate.

Putin and Singh Agree on Musharraf

15. (C) Starkov told us that during Indian PM Singh's November 12 meeting with Putin, the Prime Minister asked Putin his opinion on events in Pakistan. A cautious Putin deflected the question back to Singh and asked what India's thoughts were about its neighbor. In the end, Starkov said Putin and Singh agreed that while the current situation in Pakistan was not optimal, Musharraf was a known entity who remained the best chance for maintaining stability.

Little GOR Contact With Pakistan

16. (C) Starkov told us that GOR contact with the Pakistani government regarding the state of emergency has been limited to meetings between the Russian Ambassador in Islamabad and the Pakistani MFA. Starkov said, and the Pakistani Embassy confirmed, that no discussions have taken place in Moscow, which was in keeping with typically limited Russia-Pakistan contacts. Starkov reiterated that Russia's relationship with India is a GOR priority, and Russian ties with Pakistan reflect this fact (reftel).
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